

Voluntary Planning

**Annual Accountability Report
For The Fiscal Year 2002-2003**



**VOLUNTARY
PLANNING**

A Citizens' Policy Forum

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Accountability Statement

The accountability report of the Voluntary Planning organization for the year ended March 31, 2003, is prepared pursuant to the Provincial Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against the Voluntary Planning business plan information for the fiscal year 2002-03. The reporting of Voluntary Planning outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by Voluntary Planning management.

We acknowledge that this accountability report is the responsibility of Voluntary Planning management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Voluntary Planning business plan for the year.

Hon. Michael Baker, Minister

Vicki Harnish, Deputy Minister

Introduction

This accountability report is based on the goals, priorities and performance measures set out in the Voluntary Planning Business Plan for the fiscal year 2002-2003. The Business Plan, available on our website at [www.gov.ns.ca/vp About VP](http://www.gov.ns.ca/vp>AboutVP), more fully describes the organization's core business areas, goals and priorities for the year. It is recommended that this accountability report be read in conjunction with the business plan.

Mandate

Mission

To measurably improve the social and economic well-being* of all Nova Scotians by providing the Premier and Cabinet with valuable volunteer and citizen-based advice on relevant policy issues for today and for the future.

* The organization's Mission Statement was revised in the subsequent fiscal year to include *environmental* well-being.

The Voluntary Planning organization is unique in its ability to provide supplementary advice to Government decision makers, based on citizen input. This source of advice is not normally available to other governments in Canada.

Voluntary Planning has recently been revised and restructured. With a newly appointed Board and recruited committee volunteers, the organization is ready to provide a valuable and relevant contribution to Nova Scotia's future.

Many of the issues of importance to society are long term and horizontal in nature, ranging across departmental boundary lines. A major strength of Voluntary Planning is to help with these two areas of horizontality and long-term planning.

This key service of providing policy advice to government, based on the input of citizens and volunteers, and other experts is accomplished through major project exercises led by selected Task Forces, and through the deliberations of the Voluntary Planning Board and its standing committees.

The Voluntary Planning leadership entity is its Board of Directors, which relies heavily on regular input from six Sector Committees. These Sector groups are designed to cover the full spectrum of Nova Scotia society and, at March 31, 2003 were comprised of eighty-eight highly committed volunteers.

Sector Committees

- Economic Growth and Competitiveness
- Education and Life Long Learning
- Environmental Quality and Stewardship
- Fiscal Management Policy
- Health and Social Well-being
- Natural Resources

The Strategic Goals of the organization are to:

- Improve quality of life for Nova Scotians
- Contribute to enhanced government policy and legislation
- Ensure direct citizen participation in policy development
- Address long-term priorities – uniquely
- Provide value and relevance to government and citizens

Core Business

Voluntary Planning has a single core business, that being to enhance democracy and improve the quality of life for Nova Scotians by engaging knowledgeable volunteer members and citizens in the formulation of policy advice to the Premier, Cabinet and Departments. Operationally, Voluntary Planning does this in three distinct ways:

i) Major Task Forces

In recent years, Voluntary Planning has accepted major projects assigned by the provincial government. The Fiscal Management Task Force and the Non-Resident Land Ownership Task are two examples.

ii) Sectors

The Board of Directors relies heavily on the advice provided by six teams of senior policy advisors, known as Sectors, to identify priority issues and opportunities. These priorities, depending on mutual discussion between the Voluntary Planning Board and Cabinet, may emerge as major project topics or, may be forwarded as advice to Ministers and Cabinet.

iii) Direct Advice

On occasion, the Voluntary Planning Board, or other volunteers as assigned, are asked to provide advice directly to the Premier or other senior government representatives. This service normally would not involve consultation beyond the Board members or the set of volunteers engaged for the purpose.

Workforce

Funded Staff (FTEs): 5	Director (1)
Planning & Development Officers (3)	Secretary I (1)

The Voluntary Planning workforce has been significantly reduced in recent years, due to budget cut-backs. The above five positions are core staffing to support the ongoing Board and Sector activities. These positions may be supplemented through secondments or term positions to support major Task Force initiatives. An organizational chart is attached as Appendix A.

Priorities and Accomplishments

I Major Task Force Priorities

Priority 1.1 New Task Force

Propose several and conduct at least one major task force project in 2002-03.

Progress and Accomplishments

- i) The topic of *Population Dynamics* was identified and put forward to the Premier's Office as requiring major task force involvement.
- ii) Discussion began on the subject of *Off-Highway Vehicle Use* as a major task force initiative, which led to acceptance of the proposal by the Voluntary Planning Board, and a terms of reference and mandate being negotiated and agreed in early 2003-2004.

Priority 1.2 Fiscal Management Task Force Review

Depending on Board decision, this Task Force may re-assemble for the purpose of following up on its recommendations made in the year 2000.

Progress and Accomplishments

Voluntary Planning consistently seeks feedback from government on the degree to which it's recommendations are adopted and implemented. Citizens in general and Task Force members need a formal and transparent procedure to ascertain how their advice is being received and acted upon by government. This is essential for our business planning process as it will allow us to measure our impact.

Follow up on the Fiscal Management Task Force recommendations did not occur in 2002-2003, however, the Voluntary Planning Board continues to be interested in obtaining feedback on this initiative.

II Sector Priorities

Priority 2.1 Fully Operational Sectors

Recruit volunteers and fully activate the following six sectors during the current year:

Sector Committees

- *Economic Growth and Competitiveness*
- *Education and Life Long Learning*
- *Environmental Quality and Stewardship*
- *Fiscal Management Policy*
- *Health and Social Well-being*
- *Natural Resources*

Progress and Accomplishments

In 2002-2003, the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors approved the appointment of eighty-two recruited and highly qualified Nova Scotians to the six Sectors. The Sector Chairs were appointed in the previous fiscal year. The committees began their work in identifying priority policy issues for the Board's consideration in its business planning process, including proposals for future VP task force projects.

November 26'02, a one day special event was organized to launch Voluntary Planning in its new structure and to hear presentations and begin discussion on the subject of Population Dynamics. Premier Hamm addressed participants, followed by presentations on population trends and policy implications in both the national and provincial context. All MLAs and Deputy Ministers were invited to join the Voluntary Planning Board and Sector members for the morning session. A workshop took place in the afternoon, where Sector committees began to consider the consequences of population trends, relevant to their sphere of interest.

As part of their ongoing deliberations during the year, Sectors were asked to investigate the implications of population trends, with the goal of reporting at an Annual Meeting of Voluntary Planning, June 2003. It is anticipated this may lead to a major Voluntary Planning task force project in the near future.

III Board Priorities

Priority 3.1 Position as Advisors

Offer advice directly to the Premier and Cabinet as requested.

Progress and Accomplishments

While there were a number of meetings and presentations made to the Premier's Office on particular issues, no formal requests for advice came to the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors in this time frame. Some points of discussion are still ongoing and further involvement is anticipated.

Priority 3.2 New Project Work

Bring proposals and advice forward to government. Negotiate terms of reference for new project work.

Progress and Accomplishments

During 2002-2003, meetings took place with all provincial Deputy Ministers, individually and as a full group, to introduce the newly restructured Voluntary Planning organization. A common theme emerging from these discussions was the topic of Population Dynamics. Subsequently, a meeting was held with the Premier's staff, at which time a presentation was made on the subject. In November, 2002, at an inaugural meeting of the newly assembled Sectors with the Board of

Directors, Premier Hamm spoke about the implication of Population Dynamics on provincial policy development and expressed his pleasure that Voluntary Planning was prepared to lead a province-wide review of this subject. The day's agenda included a presentation of baseline data developed for Voluntary Planning by a research team from several Nova Scotia universities. A half-day of the conference was devoted to initial review and discussion of Population Dynamics.

A proposal for significant involvement on the Labour Skills issue was presented to the Department of Education.

Priority 3.3 Higher Profile

Authorize a promotions approach that helps Voluntary Planning adopt a higher profile within Nova Scotia.

Progress and Accomplishments

The intent of this priority is to start to establish Voluntary Planning as a well known, well-accepted entity in the eyes of Nova Scotians. This will help significantly in encouraging citizens to be more active in influencing policy directions.

2002-2003 was a rebuilding year for the organization, with a primary focus on the full activation of the Sector committees as advisory bodies to the Board of Directors and on discussions with government on potential major task force projects. With this foundation in place, it was decided to utilize 2003-2004 as the period for developing and adopting strategies and plans for Voluntary Planning to establish a higher profile within Nova Scotia.

Priority 3.4 Information Technology

Support the identification and implementation of information technology for web based collaboration with geographically diverse groups.

Progress and Accomplishments

A new web-based communication software system, called QuickPlace, was identified, purchased and put in place. This system has been used successfully to share information and co-ordinate activities among our volunteer members. It permits individuals and groups to work on a variety of issues and topics without necessarily having to travel to meet physically.

Financial Results

Voluntary Planning Budget	2002/03 Authority	2002/03 Actual
Office Overhead	42k	28k
Equipment, supplies		
Recruitment ads for 6 new Sector committees		5k
Salaries & Benefits	292k	274k
Operations	45k	41k
Travel, meeting expenses		
Total	379k	348k

Voluntary Planning's actual expenditures were under budget by \$31,000. The variance in the salary budget resulted from staff vacancies not being filled for the full fiscal year. The variance in the operation and office overhead budgets resulted from the newly formed Sector committees not being fully activated until the middle of the fiscal year.

Performance Measures

Core Business:

Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Policy Advice to the Premier & Cabinet

Voluntary Planning has a single core business, that being to enhance democracy and improve the quality of life for Nova Scotians by engaging knowledgeable volunteer members and citizens in the formulation of policy advice to the Premier, Cabinet and Departments.

Two intended outcomes of this core business are i) to raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues of public policy and ii) to have an impact on public policy in Nova Scotia.

Intended Outcome:

Raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues

Measure 1:

The number of informed comments received on issues under consideration

What does this measure tell us?

The participation level of those who have thoughtfully considered the issue

Where are we now

2002/2003 was a rebuilding year for Voluntary Planning's Board and Sectors. No major task force initiatives were undertaken during this reporting period and therefore contributions on policy matters from citizens were limited.

Where do we want to go/be in the future?

Our target for this measure is to receive, from the public, 1200 informed comments per year by 2004-2005, by adopting a higher public profile. This will be achieved by implementing strategies and plans to be developed during 2003-2004.

At the end of fiscal year 2002-2003, discussions began on a major task force project on Off-Highway Vehicle Use, for implementation in 2003-2004. This is expected to result in extensive public consultation. Citizen input may be achieved through such methods as public meetings and written submissions by mail, fax or e-mail. As the project progresses, citizens will be kept informed through the Voluntary Planning website. This is an opportunity to increase public knowledge and awareness on the issue, and to involve Nova Scotians in the developing of public policy.

Core Business:**Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Policy Advice to the Premier & Cabinet****Intended Outcome:**

Raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues

Measure 2:

The number of editorials, articles, radio or TV presentations prompted on issues under consideration

What does this measure tell us?

The degree to which the media has been prompted to participate thoughtfully in the discussion of an issue

Where are we now

2002/2003 was a rebuilding year for Voluntary Planning's Board and Sectors. No major task force initiatives were undertaken during this reporting period and therefore contributions on policy matters from citizens were limited and the anticipated media coverage did not materialize.

Where do we want to go/be in the future?

Our target for this measure is to have Voluntary Planning, or its current projects, be mentioned positively in the media in Nova Scotia, 30 times per year by 2004-2005. Three strategies are intended to achieve this target:

- Intensive use of IT to solicit public response
- Negotiate major task force work
- Fully activate six societal sectors with full membership

At the end of fiscal year 2002-2003, discussions began on a major task force project on Off-Highway Vehicle Use, for implementation in 2003-2004. This is expected to result in extensive public consultation. Citizen input may be achieved through such methods as public meetings and written submissions by mail, fax or e-mail. As the project progresses, citizens will be kept informed through the Voluntary Planning website. It is expected that the consultation process could result in extensive media coverage.

The six societal sectors, as advisory bodies to the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors, were fully active by the end of fiscal year 2002-2003. This is a major step in achieving this intended outcome with eighty-eight active, involved citizens participating on these teams. Such individuals often have many contacts within their communities and are able to "spread the word" about Voluntary Planning and policy issues of concern.

Core Business:**Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Policy Advice to the Premier & Cabinet****Intended Outcome:**

To have an impact on public policy in Nova Scotia

Measure:

The degree and potential effect of advice adopted by the provincial government

What does this measure tell us?

The adoption level of advice provided to the Premier & Cabinet and the level to which the adopted policy advice has been implemented.

Where are we now

Policy statements made in the Legislature by the Minister of Natural Resources indicate that the policy advice brought forward by the Non-Resident Land Ownership Task Force was well received. The Minister is quoted, "Mr. Speaker, back in the Spring of 2001 the government commissioned Voluntary Planning to do research on non-resident landownership. They held 17 public meetings around the province and came up with 22 recommendations. We concur with these recommendations and we are in the process now of evaluating them as to their effectiveness and when they can be implemented province-wide (April 15, 2003)".

The recommendations of the Fiscal Management Task Force have had significant influence on the direction of Government and the plans of various Departments throughout the past three years.

Where do we want to go/be in the future?

Targets and strategies to measure the impact of Voluntary Planning's policy advice to government will be developed during the 2003-2004 year.

Appendix A

Voluntary Planning Structure and Reporting Relationship



